



## Maryland Toleration Act Printable Reading Comprehension

### Introduction

In the turbulent landscape of colonial America, where religious persecution and intolerance were common, the Maryland Toleration Act of 1649 was one of the first laws enacted to provide a limited protection for religious freedom.

### Historical Context

Maryland, originally founded as a refuge for persecuted Catholics, had become embroiled in religious tensions between Catholics and Protestant settlers. The act was passed in response to growing pressure from Puritan settlers and the English government to impose religious conformity and suppress Catholicism in the colony. In 1692, however, Protestant Puritans gained control of Maryland and repealed the Maryland Toleration Act, and banned the public practice of Catholicism. The ban would remain in effect until the end of the American Revolution.

### Key Provisions

The Maryland Toleration Act, formally titled "An Act Concerning Religion," was a landmark piece of legislation that guaranteed religious freedom and tolerance to all Christians living in the colony. Key provisions of the act included:

- **Freedom of Worship:** The act guaranteed the right of all Christians to worship according to their conscience and beliefs without fear of persecution or discrimination.
- **Protection of Religious Practices:** The act protected the rights of individuals to observe the Sabbath and participate in religious ceremonies and rituals according to their own traditions.
- **Tolerance for Different Christian Denominations:** The act extended religious tolerance not only to Catholics but also to other Christian denominations, including Protestants such as Puritans and Quakers.
- **Penalties for Blasphemy and Heresy:** While the act promoted religious tolerance, it also included provisions for the punishment of blasphemy and heresy, reflecting the prevailing religious attitudes of the time. It subjected non-Christian denominations to punishments that included execution, although there are no records of the dispensation of such punishments.

### Significance and Legacy

The Maryland Toleration Act was a pioneering piece of legislation that laid the groundwork for the principle of religious freedom in America. It represented a departure from the religious intolerance and persecution that had characterized much of European and colonial history and set a precedent for the protection of religious liberty in the New World.

## **Influence on American Democracy**

The Maryland Toleration Act had a profound influence on the development of religious freedom and pluralism in America. It served as a model for other colonial charters and constitutions, including the Rhode Island Royal Charter (1663) and the Pennsylvania Frame of Government (1682), which also guaranteed religious freedom and tolerance to their inhabitants.

---

### **1. What was the main purpose of the Maryland Toleration Act of 1649?**

- A. To eliminate all forms of religion in Maryland
- B. To guarantee religious freedom for all Christians
- C. To force Puritans and Catholics to convert to Anglicanism
- D. To create laws against all non-Christian religions

### **2. Why did Maryland originally become a colony?**

- A. To provide a safe haven for persecuted Catholics
- B. To expand trade and commerce in the New World
- C. To establish a Puritan-controlled government
- D. To serve as a base for English military operations

### **3. How did the Maryland Toleration Act differ from European religious practices at the time?**

- A. It punished Christians for practicing their religion
- B. It allowed religious freedom for all people, including non-Christians
- C. It promoted a level of religious tolerance among Christians
- D. It encouraged people to abandon Christianity

### **4. Which statement best summarizes the historical context leading to the passage of the Maryland Toleration Act?**

- A. Maryland was free from religious conflicts
- B. Growing tensions between Catholics and Protestants led to the act
- C. The English government supported Catholic dominance in Maryland
- D. All settlers in Maryland agreed on religious matters

### **5. What happened to the Maryland Toleration Act in 1692?**

- A. It was expanded to include freedom for all religions
- B. It was repealed by Puritans who gained control of Maryland
- C. It was rewritten to protect only Catholic practices
- D. It became part of the U.S. Constitution

### **6. What can be inferred about attitudes toward non-Christian religions at the time?**

- A. They were welcomed and protected under the act
- B. They were tolerated but had strict limitations
- C. They were outlawed and punishable, even by death
- D. They were considered equal to Christian denominations

### **Page 3 – Answer Key**

1. **B** – To guarantee religious freedom for all Christians
2. **A** – To provide a safe haven for persecuted Catholics
3. **C** – It promoted a level of religious tolerance among Christians
4. **B** – Growing tensions between Catholics and Protestants led to the act
5. **B** – It was repealed by Puritans who gained control of Maryland
6. **C** – They were outlawed and punishable, even by death